

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 115

SP 039 597

AUTHOR Bailey, Dora L.; Helms, Ronald G.
TITLE The National Board Certified Teacher. Fastback 470.
INSTITUTION Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, IN.
ISBN ISBN-0-87367-670-X
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 50p.
AVAILABLE FROM Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789; Tel: 812-339-1156 or 800-766-1156; Web site: <http://www.pdkintl.org> (\$3).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *National Standards; *National Teacher Certification; Portfolio Assessment; State Standards; Teacher Competencies; *Teacher Competency Testing; Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Qualifications; Teachers
IDENTIFIERS National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

ABSTRACT

This fastback gives teachers and other educators a feel for being a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards candidate, offering an outline of the candidacy process, ways to assess readiness to become a candidate, and tips for proceeding through candidacy. Section 1, "National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)," discusses certification areas and who should seek NBPTS certification, noting three factors that teachers should take into account when assessing their readiness to go for NBPTS certification. Section 2, "The Candidacy Process," focuses on the portfolio; the assessment center; the evaluation process; tips for success (e.g., know the standards, be familiar with education issues, work with a mentor, work in groups, and use accurate language); and a candidate diary. Section 3, "The Evolving NBPTS," discusses state licensure versus National Board Certification, the value of National Board certification, and tangible rewards of certification. (SM)

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FASTBACK

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The National Board Certified Teacher

Dora L. Bailey
Ronald G. Helms

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Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

The National Board Certified Teacher

by
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ISBN 0-87367-670-X

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Bloomington, Indiana

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Introduction

Today any teacher can assess his or her professional competencies in relation to appropriate, authentic teaching standards by participating in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification process.

The NBPTS certification process allows teachers at all levels, prekindergarten through grade 12, to assess their skills and abilities and to demonstrate to others how they help children learn. Achieving the title, National Board Certified Teacher, or NBCT, is recognition for excellence.

In writing this fastback, we are drawing on four years of work with NBCT candidates. We are principal investigators for Ohio NBPTS grants that provide funds to work with candidates and National Board Certified Teacher mentors.¹ In this capacity we represent the support programs at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio, and Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Our purpose for writing this fastback is to give teachers and other educators a feel for being a candidate — that is, some background on NBPTS, an outline of the candidacy process, ways to assess readiness to become a candidate, and tips for proceeding though candidacy.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, composed of accomplished teachers and other education stakeholders, works to advance the teaching profession and to improve student learning. The board's mission is "to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national, voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools."² Betty Castor, president of the University of South Florida and newly appointed president of NBPTS in 1999, stated in her acceptance speech, "Progress in improving K-12 education in America must start in the classroom with the teacher. Our focus is on accomplished teaching because excellence in teaching is a prerequisite to effective student learning."³

It is teachers working in an area of certification (for example, Middle Childhood Generalist, Early Adoles-

cence/English Language Arts, or Early Adolescence Through Young Adulthood Social Studies-History) who have been and continue to be invited by the board to determine appropriate standards for that field. Therefore the standards differ to reflect the content and age differences of the various fields. However, the board decided that all of the more than 30 sets of national standards have five core propositions in common:

Core Proposition #1: Commitment to students and their learning. Accomplished teachers have a mission that extends beyond developing the cognitive capacity of their students. It entails treating students equitably, understanding how students develop and learn, and being able to recognize individual differences in students and to adjust practice to meet those differences.

Core Proposition #2: Knowledge of subjects taught and the accompanying pedagogy. Accomplished teachers appreciate how knowledge is created, organized, and linked among disciplines. This means having a command of the specialized understandings about both how to convey knowledge to their students and how to generate multiple paths to knowledge.

Core Proposition #3: Responsible management and monitoring of student learning. Accomplished teachers place a premium on student engagement. This means being mindful of principal objectives, being able to call on multiple methods to meet goals and objectives, and being able to assess student progress. Accomplished teachers also know how to orchestrate learning in group settings.

Core Proposition #4: Systematic thinking about teaching practices that lead to learning from experience. Accomplished teachers seek the advice of others and draw on education research and scholarship to improve their practice. This type of professional development entails continually making difficult choices that test the teacher's judgment.

Core Proposition #5: Membership in learning communities. Accomplished teachers are members of learning communities. They know how to work collaboratively with parents and engender two-way communication about the children they teach. They also take advantage of community resources and making community members feel that they are participants in the education of young people.⁴

In addition to developing the standards, teachers in each field of certification developed the portfolio directions and assessment center prompts by which a teacher can authentically demonstrate that he or she meets the standards. While relatively new, all of the portfolio entries and assessment center prompts have been pilot-tested by teachers in each certification field.

Accomplished teachers and board-certified teachers in an area of certification (eventually *only* board-certified teachers) serve as assessors for the teacher candidates. Based on the evidence that each teacher candidate presents, the assessors recommend certification for those who demonstrate accomplished teaching. It is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that formally certifies teachers on the recommendation from the appointed assessors.

Certification Areas

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has developed 15 fields, or areas, in which a teacher can become board-certified:

Generalist	English Language Arts
Mathematics	Science
Social Studies-History	Art
Foreign Language	Guidance Counseling
Library/Media	Music
Physical Education	Health
Vocational Education	English as a New
Exceptional Needs/ Generalist	Language

These 15 areas cross four age levels: early childhood (ages 3-8), middle childhood (ages 7-12), early adolescence (ages 11-15), and adolescence through young adulthood (ages 14-18+).

A number of certification areas have a Spanish language option. A Spanish language option means that the children and teacher can be using Spanish on the videotapes; however, the writing must be in English. These fields include: Early Childhood/Generalist, Middle Childhood/Generalist, Early Adolescence/Generalist, Early Adolescence/Mathematics, Early Adolescence/Science, Early Adolescence Through Young Adulthood/Art, and Adolescence and Young Adulthood/Social Studies-History.

The Exceptional Needs/Generalist field has only one certification area, but it is divided into five strands: early

childhood (birth-8), mild and moderately impaired, severe and multiply impaired, visually impaired, and deaf/hard of hearing.

As of this writing, certification in eight fields of teaching are available across all four age levels. New fields are added each year. In order to determine if a field of certification is being offered, call the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards at 1-800-22-TEACH or visit their website at <http://www.NBPTS.org>.

Who Should Seek NBPTS Certification

There are three factors that teachers need to take into consideration when assessing their readiness to go for NBPTS certification:

Factor 1: NBPTS requirements state that in order to become a candidate, a teacher must: 1) have been teaching for three years while holding a state teaching license, 2) be currently teaching in the field of certification, and 3) have at least eight students in that field.

Factor 2: Teachers need to assess where they are in their careers. Teachers have phases of development.⁵ Although research reports phases of teaching career development from novice to expert, there is no agreement as to what these phases are or how to get from one phase to another. There is general agreement that teachers can become more able to cause children to learn as they progress from novice to expert.⁶ Burden suggests three stages of development that seem useful for a teacher to assess readiness for NBPTS candidacy:

1. Survival: beginners struggling to harmonize classroom management, content and process instruction, and their own perceptions of teaching and learning.
2. Competency-building: teachers fine-tuning the harmony of classroom management, content and process instruction, and their own perceptions of teaching and learning.
3. Stability: teachers orchestrating their teaching style to accommodate students as learning individuals.⁷

Our experience in working with NBCT candidates suggests that teachers in the competency-building stage of development are ideally suited for candidacy. These teachers usually are striving for best practices, are questing after the latest research on learning, often are action researchers, and are trying to connect everything to everything. Teachers who are in the stability phase also make good candidates but often have already chosen demanding, alternative pathways to professionalism. Because of the demands on their time, stability-phase teachers often choose not to become candidates.

Unfortunately, not all teachers become experts. The settings in which professional experiences and development occur may hinder teachers' understanding of how children learn and how teachers can best help children learn. But even when teachers are struggling to move through the survival phase, the national standards can give teachers practicing in adverse settings a mirror to examine their teaching, their students' learn-

ing, and the instruction environment. Teachers in the survival phase are not advised to become candidates, but they are advised to acquire their discipline's standards to guide their professional journey.

Factor 3: Teachers need to reflect on how well they already meet the five core propositions for National Board Certification. These core propositions are central ideas in all of the sets of standards.

The Candidacy Process

In order to meet the standards set by the NBPTS, candidates participate in a two-part assessment procedure. The first part of the assessment procedure is the development of a portfolio using six entries to reflect various facets of teaching. The second part involves responding to four scripted prompts about teaching and content at an assessment center. Although both parts of the assessment strive for authenticity, the portfolio that each candidate creates according to specific instructions allows the candidate to represent himself or herself most authentically. In order to be successful, a candidate must demonstrate that the standards are met in their teaching. Meeting the standards includes knowledge of and an ability to use education research and "best practices."

All of the standards of a given area must be addressed through the six portfolio entries and the four assessment center prompts. For example, in Middle Childhood/Generalist there are 11 standards that have to be well represented: knowledge of students, knowledge of content and curriculum, learning environment, respect for diversity, instructional resources, meaningful applications of knowledge, multiple paths to knowledge,

assessment, family involvement, reflection, and contributions to the profession.⁸ In each response the teacher candidate must be clear, consistent, and convincing.

The Portfolio

The NBPTS portfolio process provides accomplished teachers with the opportunity to show their peers how they provide for student learning in their classrooms. It gives them an opportunity to show how far they have journeyed toward "best practice" teaching. Thus these teachers are no longer "teaching as they were taught," with the teacher directing everything, with children in rows of desks, with little student talk, or with inauthentic learning tasks that are far removed from real-world tasks.⁹ They are using "best practices" that reflect ways of teaching and learning that are meaningful to children according to recent education research.

The portfolio has several major components, which vary according to certification area. Most of the portfolio entries have been designed to correlate with actual classroom practices, a more authentic assessment process than the traditional paper/pencil testing over someone else's class or the ideal class. A totally authentic assessment would involve observers in the teacher's classroom, observing over time and interviewing participants. While this would be a preferable way to assess, it is financially prohibitive to do this for the more than three million K-12 teachers in the nation. Therefore NBPTS developed a written portfolio with detailed directions as a credible representation of actual teaching.

Once a candidate has applied for National Board candidacy, he or she will receive what past candidates now affectionately call "the Box." The Box contains all of the specific directions, forms, code bars, and so forth, that the candidate will need to complete the portfolio. The specific directions in the Box vary according to the grade level and content area of certification. However, each portfolio direction booklet asks the candidate to compose six, 10- to 15-page, descriptive, analytical, reflective papers that use students' works, videotapes, testimonials, verification statements, and other documentation as evidence. For example, the Middle Childhood/Generalist portfolio consists of six entries: 1) Writing: Thinking Through the Process (12 pages), 2) Thematic Exploration: Connections to Science (12 pages), 3) Building a Classroom Community (13 pages), 4) Building Mathematical Understandings (11 pages), 5) Documented Accomplishments I: Collaboration in the Professional Community (10 pages), and 6) Documented Accomplishments II: Outreach to Families and Community (15 pages).¹⁰ In each case, the page recommendations are maximums that do not include the additional evidence, artifacts, verification forms, and so on.

All but the last two entries require candidates to make specific reference to teaching real children, and even these two indirectly refer to children's learning. The Collaboration in the Professional Community entry asks the candidate to select the most significant professional activities of his or her career and demonstrate their importance to both student learning and his or her skill as a teacher. The Outreach to Families and Community

entry asks the candidate to demonstrate authentic interaction with families of the students he or she teaches. The interaction needs to be two-way, with families informing teachers about the children as well as teachers communicating with families about children's learning. In other words, teachers need to do more than send home children's papers and report cards. They need to do more than hold conferences that tell parents what children are not learning and not able to do. Teachers need to talk with families regularly in order to *seek* information about their students.

Two of the teaching and learning entries ask for videotape segments. Each of the two videotape entries must be no more than 20 minutes long with specific unedited and uninterrupted segments. Signs of editing or interruption disqualify the videotape. Only standard VHS videocassettes can be accepted.

Past candidates have reported that it usually takes more than 200 hours to complete the portfolio section of the certification process. Although there are many reasons why a candidate might not be successful the first time, a major reason for failing to meet the standards has been the lack of preparation or willingness to devote so much time to the process. Most successful candidates devote a large part of this time to understanding fully their certification field's standards. Understanding the standards is a part of the process that can be done gradually over time; therefore we recommend that candidates begin studying the standards ahead of time.

The Assessment Center

The assessment center portion of the certification process consists of a full day of exercises that are focused on pedagogical and content knowledge. Work at a center is done after the portfolio section has been mailed to the NBPTS. If a candidate has prepared his or her portfolio carefully, then he or she has gained an excellent knowledge of the pertinent standards and need only review before arriving at the assessment center. Having candidates write at a central location is a way of making sure that candidates do their own work. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a candidate to know how to respond appropriately at the assessment center if someone else has written the portfolio entries.

The center assessment component requires the candidate to write essays to four prompts, each for a maximum of 90 minutes. Because teachers in each field created the prompts for that field, the prompts vary in content and according to the ages of students for the level of certification. For example, math teachers created the mathematics prompts to represent what they consider most important in the field of math education. Special education teachers created the prompts for that field, and so they are dramatically different from those for mathematics.

Some certification areas' prompts focus predominately on content knowledge, as is the case with the mathematics areas. Others are more keenly focused on pedagogy. This means, for example, that Early Childhood/Generalist (ages 3-8) candidates will be assessed

on different criteria than, say, Adolescence Through Young Adult/Social Studies-History (ages 14-18+) candidates. Despite these differences, all of the fields developed a variety of prompts that address depth of knowledge, breadth of knowledge, professional readings, and instructional design.

Candidates receive preview materials to help them prepare for the assessment center experience.¹¹ Usually, one of the four prompts at the assessment center will be based directly on the materials that are sent out to candidates well in advance. Typically, another of the prompts is a teaching and learning simulation that includes student work samples and focuses on the candidate's ability to analyze and evaluate primary documents. A third prompt usually is an exploration of pedagogical content topics or issues. And one of the prompts usually includes a classroom scenario, instructions to design lesson plans, or instructions to design interdisciplinary learning experiences that address multiple learning styles. For example, the Middle Childhood/Generalist prompts ask candidates to address analyzing student work, using assessment information, using developmental inferences, and exploring curriculum resources.¹²

The assessment center exercises are administered at more than 230 testing centers across the United States each summer. At this time, the testing centers are all at Sylvan Learning sites, so that there should be one within driving distance for most teachers. Candidates have the choice of handwriting or using a word processor to produce responses to the assessment center exercises.

The Evaluation Process

Candidates must be clear, convincing, and consistent in their written responses because those form the basis for the assessors' judgments. Those responses are supplemented by the videotapes, student work samples, and other complementary materials. Each of these forms of evidence offers the assessor an opportunity to understand the candidates' work and to evaluate the candidates' practice.

The portfolio entries and the assessment center essays are judged according to the standards for that field and the criteria embodied in the scoring rubrics.¹³ As an assessor reads a submission, he or she assigns a score based on a rubric composed of detailed benchmarks with exemplars at each of the points on the scoring scale. The scoring rubric has four levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 4 representing the greatest clarity and convincing, consistent evidence.

Following is an example of an essay prompt from the *Early Adolescence/Generalist Guide to Interpreting Your National Board Certification Scores* (1999). Part 1 is the setup for the exercise. Part 2 is the prompt, which has been slightly rewritten for clarity in this context. Part 3 represents two sections of the four-part rubric for scoring a candidate's response to the prompt. We illustrate only part of the rubric that guides an assessor, the Level 1 and Level 3 benchmarks.

Part 1. This is excerpted from "Exercise 11: Using Developmental Inferences." The time limit is 90 minutes. The instructions are:

Accomplished Early Adolescence/Generalists draw on their knowledge of early adolescent development and their relationships with students to understand and foster their students' knowledge, skills, interests, aspirations, and values. They foster students' self-awareness, self-esteem, character, civic responsibility and respect for diverse individuals and groups. They capitalize on young adolescents' curiosity about the physical world and their fascination and concern with the human body and with their own growth and development. They base their instructional decisions on both their students' developmental characteristics and a broad set of goals and objectives for learning. Such decisions reflect genuine concern for young adolescents and a deep understanding of the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and ethical development of young people. They plan and organize programs that reinforce the major concepts, ideas, and actions that contribute to a healthy lifestyle, as well as promote growth and development. They select and use a variety of resources and materials to help them meet the instructional needs of all their students.¹⁴

In this exercise, the teacher is asked to display the ability to analyze and interpret students' responses to questions about adolescents and to plan an activity for a unit on self-esteem and social relationships. Teachers are asked to analyze each student's responses and describe the student's social and emotional status and development. Also, they are asked to describe and justify one activity for this unit to use with these students. Some context for the teaching scenario is given to the teacher-candidate in order to clarify the situation.

Part 2. The prompt provides a scenario. Candidates are asked to envision teaching a class of seventh-graders (ages 12-13). The seventh-graders are given a questionnaire about being an adolescent at the beginning of a unit on self-esteem and social relationships. The goals in this part of the unit are: 1) to use student responses to understand students' social and emotional status and development and 2) to employ such understanding to inform instructional planning. Candidates are asked to read and analyze three students' responses to the questionnaire. Further, the candidates are asked to write inferences that can be made about each student's social and emotional status and development given their responses. The candidates are to refer to specific details in each response to support these inferences.

The three student responses are designed to be representative of the range of answers of all students in the class. Instructions to the students read, in part:

A group of authors is planning to write a book about adolescents. They need to know how people your age think and feel, and what the stresses and pressures of a seventh-grader's life are really like. Please help the authors by responding honestly to their three questions. Make sure your responses are clear and detailed so that the authors will have a thorough understanding of what you are thinking or describing. They will not be able to ask you follow-up questions.¹⁵

The first of the authors' questions was: "What would you say are the most important worries of people your age? Name at least 3 and explain why they are worries."

Student Response #1: "In school Grades because sometimes if some people get bad grade they usually get in trouble by parents. Clothes because if you ware something stupid you get laughed at. Hair because if it's funky lookin you get laughed at."

Student Response #2: "Drugs — drugs are an important worry because peer pressure persuades you to take drugs and there not only bad for you but they're illegal. Alcohol — sometimes at parties there is alcohol and no adults and people may try to get you to try some. Sex — the media influences it and daces [dances] are sometimes too sexy."

Student Response #3: "Grades are worries because it brings down your self esteem to learn. Teachers are worries because students want to know if they are mean or not. Popularity is a worry because if feels sad when you have no one to play with outside of school."

The second of the authors' questions was: "What do people your age need to do or say or have in order to be popular with others? Do you believe that people your age ever have to go against what they believe in to be popular? Explain your answer."

Student Response #1: "They need to ware cool clothes talk bad and pretend they're all that. Yes because some people don't believe in fighting but they do it anyway to be cool and get popular."

Student Response #2: "People have to dress cool, be loud (not shy), have a good personality, and select who they pick ou, like not to offend another popular person."

No I think a person becomes more popular if he shows he's tough enough to stand up for what he is believing."

Student Response #3: "I think student would have to be like other students who are popular to be popular. Students do have to go against what they believe to be popular because popular students might believe in different things."

The third of the authors' questions was: "What kinds of things make people your age angry? Name at least three. What do people your age usually do when they get angry at these things?"

Student Response #1: "They get angry when they get teased. When people bad talk the. And also when people do something to them that they don't like. They usually fight."

Student Response #2: "When people talk about you and make fun of you When people act like their going to fight you"

Student Response #3: "One thing that makes people my age angry is being made fun of. Another thing is when students get so angry at their grades because if its low, they think they worked hard on it. Another is when teachers shout at students. When students get angry at teachers they talk back. When students get low grades they give up and do even worse in school. When made fun of students usually get physical."¹⁶

The second step to the prompt is for the candidate to design classroom activities based on what could be

known about the students' developmental abilities and needs from these writing samples. The candidate must describe one whole-class activity that could be planned for this unit, given the focus on self-esteem and social relationships. The description should include goals for the activity, what the teacher and the students would be doing, and what materials or resources might be used. Further, the teacher is asked to describe how this activity is connected to common concerns and developmental issues of young adolescents that are evident in the students' written responses.

Part 3. Scoring proceeds according to a rubric. Educational Testing Service and NBPTS have developed a rubric that consists of 4 levels with 4 being the highest. A Level 3 response, which is the second highest, would be identified by the following criteria set by NBPTS:

Response offers clear evidence of the ability to analyze and interpret students' initial responses to a work of literature and to plan a short series of literature-based lessons based on the analysis and interpretation. One or more parts of the response may be more indicative of accomplished practice than others, but viewed as a whole there is clear evidence of a Level 3 performance.

The specific characteristics of a Level 3 response include:

- All parts of the prompt are responded to in some detail, but may not be in as much detail as in a Level 4 response.
- Analysis and interpretation of and inferences about students' written responses describe the social and

emotional status and development of all three students; some parts of the analysis and interpretation may be more thorough and detailed than others and/or some students' responses may be more thoroughly analyzed/interpreted than others.

- Curricular and instructional choices are related to knowledge of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical development of young adolescents, although some areas may be more fully addressed than others.
- Whole-class activity:
 - is related to students' self-esteem and social relationships, reinforcing the major concepts, ideas and actions that contribute to a healthy lifestyle and promote growth and development, although some concepts, ideas and actions may be more fully dealt with than others;
 - is related to concerns and developmental issues evident in students' responses, although some aspects of students' responses may be dealt with more fully than others;
 - includes goals and activities related to the goals; and
 - includes some details.¹⁷

A Level 1 response, which is the lowest level, would be identified by the following criteria set by NBPTS:

Response offers little or no evidence of the ability to analyze and interpret students' initial responses to a work of literature and to plan a short series of literature-based lessons based on the analysis and interpretation.

Although there may be occasional points tangentially or vaguely related to the prompt viewed as a whole the responses provide evidence indicative of a Level 1 performance.

The characteristics of a Level 1 response include:

- One or more parts of the response may be missing, unrelated to the prompt, or very unclear.
- Analysis and interpretation of and inferences about students' written responses are brief, vague, or only minimally related to the social and emotional status and development of the students; analysis/interpretation may be limited to only one student.
- Curricular and instructional choices are not clearly related to knowledge of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical development of young adolescents; the focus may be extremely limited.
- Whole-class activity:
 - is not clearly related to students' self-esteem and social relationships, and to the major concepts, ideas and actions that contribute to a healthy lifestyle and promote growth and development; activity is limited in scope and/or depth;
 - is not clearly related to concerns and developmental issues evident in students' responses; significant aspects of students' responses may not be included;
 - goals may be omitted or inappropriate; activities may be unrelated goals; and
 - may be confusing and/or inappropriate to the specified purpose.¹⁸

Each work has its own four-point scoring rubric. The six portfolio entries and the four assessment center exercises are evaluated separately. Multiple evaluations are the rule. No assessors will read more than a single entry from a given candidate. If, when all of the scores from all of the exercises are totaled, the candidate does not have enough points to pass, then the candidate can choose which section scores to keep — scores to “bank” — and redo the other entries. The candidate may take up to three years to reach the minimal requisite aggregate passing score and may choose to redo any of the sections in order to do so.

Tips for Success

If a teacher decides to become a NBPTS candidate, there are several things he or she can do to ensure success.¹⁹ Following are five tips:

Tip #1: Know the standards. The NBPTS certification process is about setting and meeting standards for a field of teaching. Teachers should become familiar with the standards for their field, whether or not they intend to become board-certified. These standards influence states' decisions about teacher licenses, and they are influencing the master's programs in colleges of education.

We recommend that potential candidates study the standards for a year in order to internalize the language of the standards before embarking on the certification process. Copies of the various standards can be purchased through NBPTS.

Tip #2: Be familiar with education issues. The standards are all about "best practice" that has emerged from research. The standards emphasize the necessity for teachers to demonstrate a knowledge of research, issues, and ideas in education. Candidates also need a knowledge of people and issues to be able to cite them when writing the essays. For example, candidates need to know Piaget and stages of cognitive development, Howard Gardner and multiple intelligences theory, and Jerome Bruner and discovery learning.

Tip #3: Work with a mentor. Candidates are well-advised to work with a mentor who has already achieved board certification. We have dealt with some 250 candidates, most of whom have benefited from working with a Certified Teacher Mentor (CTM). The CTMs can help candidates understand the nuances of specialized professional language and the importance of the standards. They also can help candidates sort through the professional reading and develop essential writing skills.

CTMs help candidates refine their work one-on-one. For example, most candidates think that their first draft of a portfolio entry is "clear, consistent, and convincing." Often it is not, and a mentor can point out the trouble spots. CTMs also help candidates with the writing process by helping them learn how to write descriptively, analytically, and reflectively. Few candidates express feelings of inadequacy regarding their knowledge of the standards, but many are uncertain about their writing competence.²⁰

NBPTS extends mentor availability by making CTMs accessible to candidates from around the country through their webpage at <http://www.NBPTS.org> and the link "Talk to Other Teachers."

Tip #4: Work in groups. We have had the fortunate experience of providing day-long university-based support sessions that focus on writing expectations in the certification process. Ohio offers a system of support through most of its state universities, all of which take advantage of the availability of CTMs. But where such a coordinated effort is not available, candidates can still form study groups and work together with or without CTMs.

Tip #5: Use accurate language. Not only do candidates need to be able to write reflectively, analytically, and descriptively, they need to know when to use which style of writing. NBPTS defines *description* as a retelling of the classroom lesson. *Analysis* is defined as providing concrete written evidence that demonstrates the significance of the evidence submitted. *Reflection* (which is always more difficult) is thinking through decisions employed to teach the lesson. It is important in reflections to indicate how future instruction might be changed or improved. Analysis and reflection may overlap, but the focus of analysis is to provide reasons and interpretations. Analysis addresses how and why. Reflection is a "look back" that explains a change or explains why a change would not be made. Through describing, reflecting, and analyzing, a candidate identifies and recognizes "best practice" and learns to ex-

plain his or her teaching intuition in terms that can be recognized as extensions of "best practice."

A Candidate Diary

The following is a composite diary, drawn from actual candidate diaries kept on a weekly basis during the period of candidacy. Words, phrases, and paragraphs that best exemplify the candidates' feelings and attitudes were excerpted from 20 different teachers' journals. This composite is intended to offer a snapshot of the NBPTS assessment process.

January 2. I'm excited about becoming nationally certified. I know I can do it! I'm a good teacher. I care about my children. I do whatever is needed to help them learn.

January 9. I have had "the Box" [the portfolio requirements] hidden under my bed for almost a month, out of sight, out of mind. It has been a long time since I have written a formal paper. I know I am a good teacher that works hard so my students can achieve success. I keep telling myself, if I fail, the worst that could happen is that I would have grown professionally. One cannot read, apply, and reflect without growth. My struggle at this point is getting a framework of this whole project in my head. I need to be organized and structured. Can I express myself in writing?

January 16. Meeting with the group and our mentor today helped to build a skeleton of this process. Stress was quite evident. As a group, we needed to discuss the direction of our first steps

in this process. It helped to share ideas and to share feelings. Our mentor offered us support; however, I still don't see light at the end of the tunnel. I suppose this is usual at the beginning of any new process.

January 23. We gathered this past weekend and tried to make sense of the path we had chosen to take. After much discussion and searching through the portfolio directions, we decided first to look at and analyze each standard. Eight hours of discussion and writing went into analyzing the first one. Also, we did a library search and came home with 142 references. We thought that we had covered all of the standards in our research, and then realized that not one of the articles addressed the diversity standard. There is a lot to integrate! We also gathered together for an additional four hours to plan new activities and revisit those activities that are in place. It's interesting that what we thought was "good" we now felt could use some improvement. I feel somewhat better after each meeting because I feel my sense of direction growing. Reading over the standards has become a daily ritual. Yes, they are the same things we do, but I must learn to say it in their terminology. My process is beginning to develop. My friend and I talk almost daily for support.

February 13. One day I think about quitting and the next I know I'm going to make it. But I do feel that I'm growing professionally. Maybe the light at the end is starting to peek through.

February 20. Sometimes I feel that I'm trying to put too much in one paper. I am getting new ideas

to use from journals and books on education issues. However, time is still the biggest problem. I remember a lot from college and from recent readings, so these are the names that creep up in my writing. This is an introspective undertaking; it gives me a new way of looking at my teaching. This is one of the most professionally challenging things I have done in a long time. I guess juggling a family, teaching and completing this portfolio is about the most I'd ever want to do at one time.

February 27. I thought that Reading Recovery influenced me into becoming a reflective teacher, but now I realize that my reflective practice was extremely narrow. I have learned to use my reflective skills to evaluate all aspects of the core curriculum. I'm also learning a great deal about myself and my students. I videotaped my class and was shocked by the things, positive and negative, that I saw happening. I find myself feeling very insecure and talking a lot to colleagues to get their input, about general ideas on teaching writing and promoting thinking skills. I even called a math professor for help with the thinking skills paper.

March 5. The wonderful experiences of talking with people and sharing ideas outweighs the negative impact of the demanding process. There are times I feel I can't do it, but I have come this far and will try my best to finish. At this late point in time, long hours are a must to complete the writings and assemble the materials. The videos or vignettes were a major concern at the beginning, but they turned out to be fun and interesting. They

allowed me to sit back and see things I don't always see while I'm in the classroom.

March 12. I was feeling overwhelmed, and now I feel rejuvenated after talking to other teachers and seeing examples of their work at the Support Workshop the university offered. We had time to discuss and brainstorm solutions to problems we were all facing.

March 19. Excluding the research, it took approximately 25 hours per paper to write, revise, and type the final copy. However, the last entries took much less time than the first few. I guess I'm learning my standards as I write, and I'm learning how to write.

March 25. What a relief. I felt excited but upset to send it off. I was worried that something would happen to my materials, and I also felt a sadness in letting it go. I had worked very hard, and I would never see my portfolio again. I almost felt like I was losing a friend. I feel really great because I am proud of this accomplishment; however, I am emotionally drained and need a rest.

April 2. I have thought about the NBPTS project constantly and sometimes it seemed that I was at a point that I just didn't know what to do. But, working in a group has been a lifesaver because we picked up on details for each other.

April 9. I need this break to study for the assessment center and rest. Through this process, I have discovered my weaknesses and have obtained ideas to strengthen those weaknesses. Interesting how we teachers always focus on the negative. I have also learned where my strengths are!

April 16. Through this process, I have become a learner who puts into practice what I have learned. Even though I have never stopped learning, I have changed the method of my learning. Now instead of learning and working by myself, I find myself within a "community of learners" who read, discuss, cry, write, revise, write some more, argue, and finally come to a decision in a non-aggressive manner.

April 23. I must admit that I'm a bit burned out on this whole process. I have spent so many hours already and yet I don't feel prepared. I wish I had started sooner.

April 30. I feel I have come this far and would like to do the best I can at the assessment center. I have reread the standards and written notes in my book for preparation. I have skimmed articles and refreshed my memory of important persons in the various disciplines in education. I have collaborated with my peers and my mentor. Am I ready?

May 2. The assessment center exercises seem scary but intriguing. I have reread the standards, taken notes, and read various articles to prepare me to write. I feel that I live the standards, so I should know what to write on each topic. I haven't always lived them, though. When I began teaching, I was blind to them; I was overwhelmed by teaching itself. The standards actually express the end of a teaching/learning process each teacher develops as she teaches. One thing I have gained is the knowledge that there are a lot of teachers who really care about their students and look at what they do as far more than just a job. I am grate-

ful that I have had an opportunity to share time and opinions with them over the last few months. I've learned a lot. As I reflect back on these months, I am enlightened from the knowledge gained from my peers and the support of our mentor. It was a time we could discuss learning problems and share creative ideas with one another. Overall it was an exhausting but good experience; I'm glad I did it.²¹

The Evolving NBPTS

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has been able to use the slowly evolving, comprehensive knowledge base for teaching to develop standards in more than 30 teaching fields, 21 of which have been finalized. This knowledge base has been slow to be assembled because "connecting insights [needed] to be made across many fields, including human development and learning, motivation and behavior of individuals and groups, the nature of intelligence and performance, and the effects of curricular approaches and teaching strategies."²² Until the NBPTS presented an avenue for spreading professional standards, researchers and learned societies were sluggish at best in disseminating the ever-growing understanding of children and learning.

National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) are likely to be a powerful diffusion vehicle for establishing a recognized knowledge base for teaching and learning. To date, more than 4,800 NBCTs reside in the 50 states, with North Carolina (more than 1,200 NBCTs) and Ohio (more than 600) currently leading the way. NBPTS intends to "involve these highly accomplished teachers in education reform movements across the country."²³

Those responsible for the education of America's youth are convinced that this authentic assessment process benefits all involved. As of this writing, 38 state departments of education and 120 local school boards are supporting teachers' candidacy for NBPTS certification. Many school boards, state departments of education, and universities have organized annual ceremonies to acknowledge the work of NBPTS candidates. In 1997 President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard Riley held a reception for National Board Certified Teachers.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has been widely recognized. At an ever-increasing pace, learned societies and professional organizations are recognizing the importance of NBPTS. For example, National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Executive Director Martharose Laffery announced that the organization encourages pre-K-12 social studies educators to become certified by the NBPTS. In fact, NCSS has discontinued its own Advanced Certification Program with the expectation that exemplary social studies teachers will become National Board Certified Teachers.²⁴

Following are some of the other professional organizations that have endorsed NBPTS certification: American Association of School Administrators, American Educational Research Association, American Federation of Teachers, Association of Colleges and Schools of Education in State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and Affiliated Private Universities, Association of Teacher Educators, Council for American Private Education, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council

of Great Cities Schools, International Reading Association, National Alliance of Black School Educators, National Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Education Association, National Governors' Association, National Middle Schools Association, and the National School Boards Association.²⁵

It should be noted that the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT) standards are in accord with National Board standards.²⁶

Teachers have been and will continue to be central in planning, developing, implementing, and modifying the NBPTS and its standards, policies, and procedures. Anyone who works with candidates can be educated about the process by accomplished teachers and other NBPTS personnel at the NBPTS Facilitator's Institute, which is held in many sites around the nation at various times. NBPTS also conducts a yearly academy that is open to educators on a first come, first served basis.²⁷ Readers can check the NBPTS website for up-to-date information.

State Licensure vs. National Board Certification

National Board Certification is different from state licensure. Each U.S. state issues teaching licenses based

on completion of an approved college program and renews such licenses on completion of a given amount (varies by state) of continuing education units (CEU) or college credits. Most states have reciprocal license agreements with some of the other states. But the bottom line is that only the state has the power to license teachers, and teachers must be licensed in order to be eligible for employment.

The National Board has adopted the term *certification* as the label for its assessment process. That process is voluntary; a teacher chooses to try to become board certified. If successful in the process, as determined by his or her peers, then the teacher is termed a National Board Certified Teacher, or NBCT. Achievement of NBCT status does not affect eligibility for employment; however, as the reputation of the NBPTS grows, so grows the desirability of the NBCT designation.

The Value of National Board Certification

As teachers learn about the National Board, several questions surface: What would going through the process mean to an individual teacher? Is going through the process valuable to the individual teacher? In order to answer these questions, there are five prerequisite questions that should be considered.

1. *Would insight about how you stand in relation to the standards in your teaching field be valuable?* Many teachers want to assess themselves in relation to a set of standards for the field in which they teach. These teachers want a way to know how well they are helping young

people learn. Reflecting on the standards and having other teachers judge whether one reflected, analyzed, or described in a manner that demonstrates that the standards are met is a risk and is intimidating. Therefore each teacher needs to decide, individually, whether to take the risk in order to gain insights about his or her teaching.

2. *Are you willing to commit a significant amount of time and energy?* As of this writing, there are more than 4,800 National Board Certified Teachers across 21 certification areas. All of them report that going through the process required between 200 and 500 hours. None of the candidates reported being prepared to give that kind of time initially; but once they started the process, they all decided that they had to finish it.

3. *Does your state support this effort in some way?* Several states will fund the initial \$2,300 application fee for NBPTS. Ohio funds the first 600 teachers who have been through a three-hour orientation given by an NBCT. The process is demanding; but if the state offers mentor guidance or assistance in paying the fee, it can affect a teacher's decision about becoming a candidate. Information about district and state support can be found on the NBPTS website.

4. *Does your school district support or honor National Board Certification?* Some school districts offer support for candidates. For example, Warren City School District in Ohio allows teacher candidates to use sick leave in order to complete the portfolio requirements. Other districts provide incentives for NBCTs. Los Angeles, for example, provides a 15% pay increment. As National

Board Certification gains recognition, more school districts are likely to offer support and recognition.

5. *Do you have time and interest in making the commitment to pursue National Board Certification?* Many excellent teachers already have satisfying outlets for expressing and experiencing professionalism that require so much time that they cannot commit to the NBPTS certification process. Indeed, some of the best candidates fit this profile. And so a key issue is making the commitment — and making the time.

The Tangible Rewards of Certification

As we indicated previously, various states are at different stages in their tangible recognition of the value of National Board Certification. In some states — North Carolina and Ohio are examples — teachers who become NBCTs receive incentive pay. Ohio's incentive pay increment for an NBCT is \$2,500 a year, for the life of the certificate (10 years). As an additional incentive, some local school districts pay stipends to teachers who gain National Board Certification. For example, Cincinnati pays its NBCTs \$1,000 a year for the life of the certificate in addition to the \$2,500 that the state pays. The Los Angeles Unified School District and the United Teachers-Los Angeles agreed to an overall 15% increase in pay above the base rate for their Certified Teachers for the life of the certificate. This is the largest incentive to date. Many school districts support and honor NBPTS certification in some way: money, release time, or through differentiated responsibilities and assignments.

Another reward is "license portability." Several states have agreed to accept NBPTS certification as validation of teacher professionalism when teachers move from state to state. For example, the Colorado Department of Education will issue a Professional Teacher License to any applicant who is certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As new agreements are being made from time to time, readers may want to visit the NBPTS website for up-to-date information about "license portability."

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for first-aid treatment in this 1912 scene from
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